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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4966
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1059
RUEHSL/AMEMBASSY BRATISLAVA 0064
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 9830
RUEHCP/AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN 0279
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 4288
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1750
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 3477
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0472
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 6927
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 4545
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA 0865
RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 0868
RUDKIA/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 0566
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 2813
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0458
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 001170

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STATE FOR EAP/MLS; PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/30/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KHIV](#) [PREL](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: BURMA: 11 AIDS ACTIVISTS AND 20 MONKS ARRESTED

REF: RANGOON 1123

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Classified By: P/E Chief Leslie Hayden for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Eleven HIV/AIDS activists close to the 88 Students Generation Group were arrested August 13 for not properly registering to spend the night at a monastery where they were preparing a ceremony for HIV/AIDS victims. Members of Min Ko Naing's Students Group and the NLD gathered at the jail and court to show support for their colleagues and the activists were released without being charged late afternoon on August 14. The arrests come on the heels of the widely attended 8-8-88 commemoration ceremony organized by Min Ko Naing at another monastery. The arrests appear intended to discourage further demonstrations by political activists, rather than a move against HIV/AIDS workers.

¶2. (SBU) Around 2:00 a.m. on August 13, local police arrested eleven members of the "Tear Group" an organization that assists those infected with HIV/AIDS and educates the Burmese public about the disease. The eleven arrested are NLD members and activists close to the 88 Generation Students Group. The activists had gathered at the Maggin Buddhist Monastery, just outside of Rangoon, to hold a ceremony for approximately 40 HIV/AIDS sufferers. When they arrived at the monastery the night before the ceremony, the activists were asked by the local township warden to leave their names and register for permission to stay overnight at the monastery. The group turned in their names but did not receive a receipt from the warden to prove they had registered. USDA members who were organizing a separate, government sponsored event at the monastery, assured them they had met the requirements and there would be no problems.

¶3. (SBU) At approximately 2:00 a.m., local police raided the monastery and arrested all eleven activists for not registering properly at the local warden's office. When those who planned to participate in the ceremony arrived at the monastery later in the morning and learned of the arrest, they quickly gathered at the jail, where the eleven were being held, to show their support. 88 Generation Student leader Min Ko Naing heard about the arrest and brought others from the 88 Generation Group to show support. When the crowd gathered at the station, the police quickly split up the eleven and moved them to three separate jails to disburse the crowd.

¶4. (SBU) A hearing for all eleven activists was scheduled for the morning of August 14, but when Emboffs arrived at the courthouse it was announced the hearing had been postponed. Min Ko Naing's group and the NLD had shown up in force to support their colleagues during the hearing and appeared to startle the court officials, making them nervous. The officials decided to check with their superiors before proceeding with such a high-profile event. Late afternoon August 14, all eleven activists were released without being charged.

¶5. (SBU) Additionally, Min Ko Naing informed us that 20 Buddhist monks had been arrested August 13 at a village monastery in the Toung Gout township in Rakhine State. The monks are known as "activists" who oppose the regime and also have ties to the 88 Students Generation Group. Min Ko Naing emphasized that Burmese authorities try to bribe and pressure monks known to have connections to activists. In fact, the Maggin Buddhist Monastery has already come under regime pressure to choose a senior abbot supportive of the SPDC. The Maggin Monastery was the original site of the Group's August 8 commemoration ceremony (reftel) until close scrutiny

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by the SPDC forced the Students to change the venue at the last minute.

¶6. (C) Min Ko Naing told us the police officers had not wanted to arrest the activists, but that military intelligence had forced them to act. He speculated that the arrests were part of an ongoing power struggle between the police and the military.

¶7. (C) Family members of the arrested activists told us the local warden and the district chairman opposed any humanitarian activities in their area. They spread rumors that AIDS would spread to residents through the patients' urine and feces and had threatened to shut down the Dutch INGO AZG (MSF Holland), which operates AIDS clinics in the area. The AZG Country Director, however, told us he has heard no such threat.

¶8. (C) COMMENT: The arrest of the HIV/AIDS activists comes on the heels of heightened activity by the 88 Students Generation Group and their successful and widely attended commemoration of the 8-8-88 uprising (reftel). The Maggin Monastery has recently been under scrutiny and pressure due to their connection to the Students Group. It appears these arrests were intended to intimidate activists in general and not HIV/AIDS workers specifically. The regime was caught by surprise by the size of the crowds Min Ko Naing mobilized last week and likely moved against the HIV/AIDS activists, especially given their NLD ties, to discourage further large demonstrations. END COMMENT.
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